Shirt Factory Girl – Artist: Éireál

The factory horn is a banshee’s cry
Callin' through the gray of the Derry sky.
A thousand needles in a noise-filled room,
Stitching out a life through the factory gloom
Sixteen years old with her hair tied back,
Taming the thunder of the silver track..
Heat in the air and a blur in the light,
A daughter of the city in the centre of it's might.

The whistle blows long and the gates swing wide,
A swarm of scarves like a bright-coloured tide.
Across the Foyle where the cold winds blow,
Leaving the Cityside and the factory glow.
Over the bridge onto Spencer Road,
Carrying her wages for the family load.
Up Fountain Hill where the breath comes tight,
Past Rose Cottage in the fading light.

Chorus
BUT OH, WHEN THE DUST SETTLES DOWN ON THE FLOOR,
SHE'S RUNNING FOR HOME AND SHE'S OUT THROUGH THE DOOR!
Goodbye to the collar, the cuff, and the seam,
She's trading the starch for a midsummer dream.
Onto Irish Street for her tea and a wash,
Shaking off the fibres and the factory scut.
Two nights a week, let the music begin—
She's dancing the ghosts out of Derry again!

She reaches her home on the right-hand side,
With a "Parliament" spirit and a quiet pride.
She lays the wage packet down on the wood,
Unopened and honest for the family food.
The law of the house and the strength of the land,
Held in the palm of a young girl's hand.
Now a WOMAN who earns and a WOMAN who gives,
That is the rhythm where the memory lives.

The men at the corners just step to the side,
Watching the Queens of the Factory stride.
With a nod of respect for the bread and the bone,
For the formidable grace that the women have shown.
The starch in the shirt and the lace in the bite,
They kept the city beating when times were tight.

OH, WHEN THE DUST SETTLES DOWN ON THE FLOOR,
SHE'S RUNNING FOR HOME AND SHE'S OUT THROUGH THE DOOR!
Goodbye to the bobbin, the needle the steam,
She's trading the scissors for a midsummer dream.
Onto Irish Street for her tea and a wash,
Shaking off the fibres and the factory scut.
Two nights a week, let the music begin—
She's dancing the ghosts out of Derry again!

Outro
Monday Morning.
Shine the shoes.
[Vocals become rhythmic and firm, no longer singing but "calling" out the route in time with the machine pulse]
Past Rose Cottage.
Down Fountain Hill.
Across the bridge.
Back to the Mill.....,,,
The music—it's starting all over again.
The music—it's starting all over again.

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Shirt Factory Girl - Song Notes

This song is a rhythmic tribute to the "Quick Learners" of the Derry shirt industry, specifically honoring my mum **Rosaleen McGinley** and her journey from schoolgirl to breadwinner.

It captures the "Shortest Weekend"—that 48-hour transition in 1945 when a fourteen-year-old hung up her schoolbag on a Friday and "tamed the thunder" of a thousand industrial sewing machines by Monday morning.

The lyrics trace a vivid map of a vanished city, following the "Run Home" from the **Cityside** gateway of the **Tillie & Henderson** factory, across the **Craigavon Bridge**, and up the steep pull of **Fountain Hill** to the heart of the Waterside. It celebrates the "Parliament of the Floor"—the wit, the singing, and the fierce sisterhood of women from the **Bog**, **the Brandywell**, **the Fountain**, and **the Top of the Hill**.

More than just a history of "piecework" and "scut," the song explores the formidable grace of the women who out-earned the men and kept the city's pulse beating. It concludes with the "Living Legacy" of these factory queens, whose determination and wit are the primary ingredients in the DNA of every confident "Derry Girl" today.

This song my book and other material can be found at: Owen Brennan Archive at:

https://archive.org/details/@owen_brennan_archive